

Women's Soccer League offers HEHF employee fun, exercise, social interaction

This is another in the series of articles that have accompanied the Make Your Move program, featuring Hanford workers who are physically active.

What happens when soccer moms seat their families on the sidelines, don shinguards and uniforms and join other moms on the field for a soccer game? They have fun!

Jan McKee, a strategic initiative specialist for Hanford Environmental Health Foundation, can confirm that. Although technically not a soccer mom - her young children do not play the sport, yet - McKee is a member of the Women's League of the Columbia Basin Soccer Association. She has been playing with the same core group of women for 12 years and can attest to the fact that her teammates will go through intricate babysitting arrangements and schedule manipulations to be able to play soccer. "These are ladies who really want to play soccer," McKee said.

Now, mind you, not all the women are soccer moms - some are single without children, many are married with grown families and some have convinced their daughters to join the league. The players' ages range from 15 to early 50s, and experience runs the gamut as well. Some are experts, having played in school or in very competitive leagues, and other women are just learning to play the game.



Members of the "Wild Things" soccer team get ready to play at a recent game.

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McKee started when an acquaintance convinced her to give soccer a try. As a former field hockey player from Maine, McKee had a general idea of the game. "Field-hockey and soccer have some similar rules, but I got a lot of help on the field from my teammates," she said.

The Women's League of the Columbia Basin Soccer Association has one division, comprising six teams with a total of more than 80 players. Soccer is played year-round, but the numbers of players on the field vary with the season. "We play 11 a side in spring and fall; 5 a side in winter and the games are played indoors; and 7 a side in summer, when the games are played on a smaller field," explained McKee. "We only have a few weeks' break in between seasons, so we don't get out of shape."

The only requirements for play are shinguards, athletic shoes or soccer cleats and membership in the Washington State Soccer Association. The cost of an annual membership is \$27 per person.

McKee's team is the "Wild Things," and team members wear the same colored jerseys. Other teams have uniforms. Official referees are hired to run the games.

Although the action on the field gets intense, the actions off the field sometimes distract the attention of the players. Family members of the players are often recruited to babysit a number of younger children. When babysitters are overwhelmed, player moms often stop play to run off the field to hug a crying baby, settle a fight among siblings or yell at a child on a forbidden piece of playground equipment near the field. And, of course, the fans take their turns at cheering and advising their wives, aunts, sisters, daughters and moms.

"Playing soccer is a great stress-reducing activity," said McKee. "Not only do you get the benefit of the exercise, but you interact with ladies who talk about husbands, family and work. The social interaction is beneficial as well."

Have you ever considered playing soccer and experiencing the fun the kids have? You can give the game a try by playing in the Women's League; beginners are welcome. Call Jan McKee at 372-2086 for more information. ■